Deep Belonging for the Great Turning

Ryan Van Lenning Follow 6 min read · Aug 18, 2020

> *"If grief can be a doorway to love, then let us all weep for the world we are breaking apart so we can love it back to wholeness." ~Robin Wall Kimmerer*

Today marks the deep summer new moon and it has me leaning into the theme of the "new normal" and holding the holy wholeness.

It is said that humans love the status quo. Yet wild nature is flux and flow. Wild nature is dynamic, cyclical, and resilient — an ever-continuous and breaking down and renewal. And that's exactly where we find ourselves: **a unique confluence of breaking down and renewal.**

Welcome to the Great Unraveling/Great Turning. Disruption is here and several recent images linger in me:

Columbus collaspsing

Statues falling and empty pedestals. Columbus and Confederates are sinking into the sea. The old forms just cannot stand anymore. And we cannot bear to withstand them. In Bristol, a slaver's statue was pushed in to the waters and temporarily replaced with the striking form of a Black Lives Matter activist. ***It raises the question: What shall we put on our pedestals now?***

A second image: A knee on his neck. The white knee on his black neck. 8 minutes. 46 seconds. George Floyd's body on the pavement. A match to the long-gathered kindling. One result: a fire of protests across the world.

A third: the magnified and even beautiful color-enhanced image of Covid-19, the invisible shape-shifting killer. The numbers boggle the mind. We struggle to metabolize them. We struggle to know how to appropriately respond. How can something so minute wreak such havoc to all the normalities? What other invisibilities within us are seeding new normalities?

Finally: A young child absolutely, unashamedly, and joyfully splashing butt naked in the refreshing waters of a wild river in deep July. This most basic of human expressions: innocent, glorious, un-'adult'erated play.

Perhaps you too have the images that stick in you. You know something has changed profoundly, in you and the external world — the two not being so separate as we thought. *How can terror and joy, life and death, live in us so closely together? And yet they do.*

Catastrophes and upheavals in the physical climate system, the biosphere and the cultural sphere greet us daily. Ongoing reckoning of our endemic racist culture and structures. Protests to protect black lives. Pandemic anxiety and pandemic fatigue. The rise of fascist, authoritarian and omnicidal moves by an administration buttressed by white supremacy and the directives of amoral extractive capitalism. Famine and mass migration. Decimated bird and butterfly populations and sick coral reefs. A blue ocean event looming in the Arctic. Carbon pollution that is transforming the very chemical composition of the world in which we all live.

At **the same time: whales are able to sing** and be in more conversations because of the drop in human-made noise pollution. People are resurrecting dreams and connecting in new/old ways. Previously unseen shadows are surfacing for examination. Children being able to see the milky way, perhaps for the first time because of decreased emissions that had choked out the cosmic backdrop. Birdsong is more noticeable, perhaps brighter.

Is it any wonder, then, that all of it has evoked deep grief, anger, numbness, new joys and old pleasures, and quite a few species of confusion to the surface? These are all expected and fully appropriate responses to a deeply troubled and complicated moment. How can we hold it all? How can we hold the path towards holy wholeness?

Might we begin practicing conversations about letting go of what we consider normal in industrial, consumer societies? Will we practice learning how to say hello to one another again? Will we imagine new/old ways of loving ourselves, each other and the world? Because at the root of the intersecting crises facing us are crises of relating, crises of belonging.

I want to suggest a frame, one I find both hopeful and useful and that might help us hold all of this: We are in a collective rite-of-passage. This era has been called The Great Unraveling/Great Turning by Joanna Macy. Transition, The Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene by others. **Regardless of the name, it is a threshold moment.** Things are dying and being died to, and things are being painfully and sometimes joyfully born, examined, and healed. Tipping points have been reached. We know from nature and our own lives that often the disintegration happens simultaneously with the regeneration.

The Great Turning requires an interruption and composting of the forms, currencies, images, ways of relating and unhealthy habits of being that sustain business as usual. It requires developing stamina for the mess and cultivating capacity for being comfortable with uncomfortabilities, uncertainties, and paradoxes. It requires learning how to deeply grieve again — together. And it requires a vast re-belonging and re-membering.

And the on-going work of social justice must continue unabated. **Anti-racist and decolonial work *is* healing work *is* ecotherapeutic work *is* rewilding work.** These are not and cannot be separate if we are to dream ourselves into regenerative, cooperative, co-liberatory, and earth-honoring habits of being and doing.

It’s a tall order. It fact it’s too tall, as all sacred journeys are. Yet…I think we’re up to the task. In fact, I think it’s why we’re here now. Doing this. Beingness. Together. As earth elder Joanna Macy reminds us over and over, it is a gift to be alive right now.

We didn’t create all of this. And we won’t heal all of this. BUT, we can each play a role in holding the holy wholing. We can wonder ourselves into the new paradigm. Perhaps, we can learn from green beans, who seek the light with their graceful upward spiral dance of wondering. We might not be as graceful as beans. But then again, by definition grace comes in unexpected, unpredictable forms.

So we ask ourselves: What is my niche in the ecosystem of healing and justice? **How can I embody my sacred why and contribute my gifts in service to the Great Turning?**

I call it Wild Purpose. It requires a rounding out of our wholeness, a deep trust and deep listening, a reckoning with our respons-ability, and acting from a place of fierce determination and love. *“This is our work, to discover what we can give. Isn’t this the purpose of educating, to learn the nature of our own gifts, and how to use them for the good of the world?”* Robin Wall Kimmerer asks in *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

My own wild purpose with Wild Nature Heart intersects with helping to hold the holy wholing of this moment. I do this through 1:1 earth-based mentoring, Deep Belonging courses, poetry and writing, and custom wilderness rite-of-passage ceremonies. I walk with people at a crossroads to trust their inner guide, embody their wholeness, and live their wild purpose.

Things can fall apart and we still act from love in meaningful action. So here's to unapologetically embodying wholeness, reckoning with the truth, and putting our shoulders and hearts to the Wheel of the Great Turning.

Now, go and feed your dreamshed, have a conversation with the heron, and call for justice for Breonna Taylor. Tear some old statue down within you. See where you can help take knees off necks and give form to your invisible mysteries. Enjoy the deep summer sun and plumping berries, play with abandon, rest robustly, savor your breath, and trust your wild desires.

Let's all embody bean wisdom, and circumnutate this Great Unraveling/Great Turning together.

With the irrepressible, scrumtrulescent flow of the river towards the great sea,

Ryan
Director of Creative Earthiness, Wild Nature Heart
Ancestral Wiyot and Yurok territories, Northern California

The next Deep Belonging for the Great Turning course starts October 27. Learn more or reserve your spot now.

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Written by Ryan Van Lenning

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Ryan is an ecotherapist, wilderness rite-of-passage guide, and poet, founder of Wild Nature Heart, and the author of Re-Membering: Poems of Earth & Soul.

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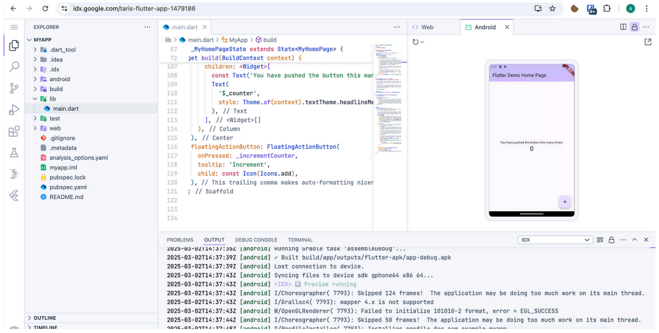
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OUTLINE
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main.dart
lib > main.dart > MyApp > build
Web
Android
Flutter Demo Home Page
You have pushed the button this many times:
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PROBLEMS
OUTPUT
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 _MyHomePageState extends State<MyHomePage> {
jet build(BuildContext context) {
      children: <Widget>[
        const Text('You have pushed the button this mar
        Text(
          '$_counter',
          style: Theme.of(context).textTheme.headlineMe
        ), // Text
      ], // <Widget>[]
    ), // Column
  ), // Center
  floatingActionButton: FloatingActionButton(
    onPressed: _incrementCounter,
    tooltip: 'Increment',
    child: const Icon(Icons.add),
  ), // This trailing comma makes auto-formatting nicer
; // Scaffold
```

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2025-03-02T14:37:35Z [android] Running Gradle task 'assembleDebug'...
2025-03-02T14:37:39Z [android] ✓ Built build/app/outputs/flutter-apk/app-debug.apk
2025-03-02T14:37:39Z [android] Lost connection to device.
2025-03-02T14:37:43Z [android] Syncing files to device sdk gphone64 x86 64...
2025-03-02T14:37:43Z [android] <IDX> Preview running
2025-03-02T14:37:43Z [android] I/Choreographer( 7793): Skipped 124 frames!  The application may be doing too much work on its main thread.
2025-03-02T14:37:43Z [android] I/Gralloc4( 7793): mapper 4.x is not supported
2025-03-02T14:37:43Z [android] W/OpenGLRenderer( 7793): Failed to initialize 101010-2 format, error = EGL_SUCCESS
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